

TO: MPA 508 Students
FR: Ellen L. Halpern, Ph.D.
RE: Opening Letter

August 18, 2009

Welcome to the *MPA 508: Research Methods and Statistics* course, online, Fall 2009!

Through this course, you will obtain an introduction to the research methods and statistical techniques that are used by managers in the non-profit and public sector to develop and study public policy and management issues. Our lives, both professional and personal, are filled with the need to make decisions based on ever-increasing amounts of complex and uncertain data. Basic knowledge and understanding of both research concepts and statistical techniques can contribute to evaluating important issues in a more scientifically sound manner. This course will not transform you into a professional statistician or data analyst: it will provide an understanding of some of the important tools, and facilitate the development of the ability to discern when it is time to call in an expert. This course will expose you to a wide range of applications and approaches, with assignments designed to provide experience in designing research, analyzing the results, and interpreting both your own and others' work.

Prior to the actual start of class on August 31, you will have access to the course on iLearn, Marist's online course environment (<https://ilearn.marist.edu/xsl-portal>). Instructions on accessing the course appear on the e-learning website. As you enter the course for the first time, you will find links to the syllabus and other course materials along the left side of the display. Please consult the syllabus frequently to ensure that you are keeping up with the reading and assignments. You'll also notice links to messages and forums for individual communication and group discussion, respectively. The syllabus serves as your guide and contract for the course. Each week, a summary of that week's requirements will be provided, including schedule changes as needed.

During the first week we are principally going to get comfortable with one another and to learn about the structure of the course. The getting acquainted experience is an integral part of the course, as it will also include spending some time communicating to insure that we are all familiar with the various expectations and outcomes. Everyone will have the opportunity to get up to speed on simple analytical tasks in preparation for the more complex material to follow. This course benefits tremendously from interactions with one another in perusing, digesting, and evaluating the material.

Although this course will provide you with a solid introduction to principles of research design, the emphasis will be on the statistical approaches that researchers and program evaluators use to analyze and interpret their results.

Required Text

Introduction to the Practice of Statistics, 5th edition, by David S. Moore and George McCabe (Freeman, 2005, ISBN: 0-7167-6400-8) [M&M]

Optional Supplementary Texts

Applied Statistics for Public and Nonprofit Administration, 6th edition, by Kenneth Meier, Jeff Brudney, and John Bohte, (Thomson/Wadsworth, 2006, ISBN: 0-534-60268-1) [Meier]

Study Guide with Selected Solutions for Moore and McCabe's Introduction to the Practice of Statistics, Fifth Edition, by Michael Fligner (Freeman, 2006, ISBN: 0-7167-6358-3)

Introduction to the Practice of Statistics Excel Manual with Macros, by Linda Dawson (Freeman, 2005, ISBN: 0-7167-6360-5)

You can purchase the textbooks through the Marist Bookstore (<http://marist.bkstore.com>), or order them online. The Meier book is also available in the Marist Library.

Computer Use

We will be using Microsoft Excel because it is readily available on most computers, commonly used for policy analysis and presentations, and capable of performing the statistical tasks required for this course. Any version of Excel is acceptable. More advanced students who wish to use specialized statistical software, such as SPSS, are encouraged to discuss this option with the professor.

Please make sure to get your text before class begins.

Please feel free to contact me at anytime – (ellen.halpern@marist.edu) (908-361-3733). Make sure to identify yourself as a student in this course!

I look forward to meeting you during the week of August 31st.!